



The Fire Ant Wars: Nature, Science, and Public Policy in Twentieth-Century America

Joshua Blu Buhs

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Sometime in the first half of the twentieth century, a coterie of fire ants came ashore from South American ships docked in Mobile, Alabama. Fanning out across the region, the fire ants invaded the South, damaging crops, harassing game animals, and hindering harvesting methods. Responding to a collective call from southerners to eliminate these invasive pests, the U.S. Department of Agriculture developed a campaign that not only failed to eradicate the fire ants but left a wake of dead wildlife, sickened cattle, and public protest.

With political intrigue, environmental tragedy, and such figures as Rachel Carson and E. O. Wilson, *The Fire Ant Wars* is a grippingly perceptive tale of changing social attitudes and scientific practices. Tracing the political and scientific eradication campaigns, Joshua Buhs's bracing study uses the saga as a means to consider twentieth-century American concepts of nature and environmental stewardship. In telling the story, Buhs explores how human concepts of nature evolve and how these ideas affect the natural and social worlds.

Spotlighting a particular issue to discuss larger questions of science, public perceptions, and public policy—from pre-environmental awareness to the activist years of the early environmental movement—*The Fire Ant Wars* will appeal to historians of science, environmentalists, and biologists alike.

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